

BYZANTINE VIEWS OF ISLAM

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NO knowledge of the Islamic teachings is evident in Byzantine literature before the beginning of the eighth century. We know that the spiritual and intellectual encounter of Muhammad and the first generations of his followers with Christianity involved not the imperial Orthodox Church, but the Monophysite and Nestorian communities which made up the majority of the Christian population in Arabia, Egypt, Syria, and Mesopotamia. Until the end of the Umayyad period, these Syrian or Coptic Christians were the chief, and practically the only, spokesmen for the Christian faith in the Caliphate. And it was through the intermediary of these communities—and often by means of a double translation, from Greek into Syriac, and from Syriac into Arabic—that the Arabs first became acquainted with the works of Aristotle, Plato, Galien, Hippocrates, and Plotinus.¹ Among the Monophysites and Nestorians, the Arabs found many civil servants, diplomats, and businessmen who were willing to help in the building of their Empire, and who often preferred, at least in the beginning, to accomodate themselves to the Moslem yoke, rather than suffer oppression which in the Orthodox Chalcedonian Empire of Byzantium was the fate of all religious dissidents.

The first encounter of Islam with Orthodox Christianity took place on the battlefield, in the wars which since the seventh century have opposed the Arabs to the Greek emperors. Both civilizations thus confronted were, to a large extent, shaped by their respective religious ideologies, and each side interpreted the attitudes and actions of the other as motivated by religion. If the Qurran appealed to a holy war against “those who ascribe partners to God”—i.e., Christians who believe in the Trinity²—the Byzantine retaliated, after the example of St. John of Damascus, by considering Islam as a “fore-runner of Antichrist” (πρόδρομος τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου).³ But, however abrupt were these statements of mutual intolerance, however fanatical the appeals to a holy war, a better mutual appreciation was gradually brought about by the requirements of diplomacy, the necessity of coexistence in the occupied areas, and the cool reflection of informed minds.

My purpose here is to examine the encounter between Byzantium and Islam in the sphere of religion. Limitations of space do not permit me to do more than offer a few selected examples illustrating various attitudes of the Byzantines towards the Moslem faith. These examples will be drawn from four categories of documents:

1. Polemical literature
2. Canonical and liturgical texts
3. Official letters sent by Byzantine dignitaries to their Moslem counterparts
4. Hagiographical materials.

¹ Cf. L. Gardet, “Théologie musulmane et pensée patristique,” in *Revue Thomiste*, 47 (1947), pp. 51–53. ² Sura, IX, V, 5. ³ *De haeresibus*, PG, 94, col. 764 A.

I

The name of John of Damascus usually heads every list of Christian anti-Moslem polemicists.⁴

According to traditional accounts, John belonged to the wealthy Damascene family of Sergius Mansur, an official of the Byzantine financial administration of Damascus, who negotiated the surrender of the city to the Arabs in 635, preserved his civil functions under the new regime, and transmitted his office to his descendants. John, according to this tradition, was his grandson. After exercising his duties for a while, he retired to the monastery of Saint-Sabbas in Palestine and became one of the most famous theologians and hymnographers of the Greek Church.

If we are to believe this traditional account, the information that John was in the Arab administration of Damascus under the Umayyads and had, therefore, a first-hand knowledge of the Arab Moslem civilization, would, of course, be very valuable. Unfortunately, the story is mainly based upon an eleventh-century Arabic life, which in other respects is full of incredible legends. Earlier sources are much more reserved. Theophanes tells us that John's *father* was a γενικός λογοθέτης under the Caliph Abdul-Melek (685-705),⁵ which probably means that he was in charge of collecting taxes from the Christian community. Such a post would not necessarily imply deep acquaintance with the Arab civilization. The *Acts* of the Seventh Council seem to suggest that John inherited his father's post, for they compare his retirement to Saint-Sabbas to the conversion of the Apostle Matthew, who, before he became a follower of Christ, was a "publican" i.e., a "tax-collector."⁶

Since the information available to us on John's life is very meager, it is only from his writings that we can form an accurate idea of his thoughts and his views on Islam. Unfortunately, a close examination of his work reveals very few writings connected with Islam.

Johannes M. Hoeck, in his critical analysis of the Damascene's manuscript tradition,⁷ mentions four works connected with John's name which deal with Islam:

1. A chapter of the *De haeresibus*,⁸ a catalogue of heresies, which is part of John of Damascus' main work, the *Source of Knowledge* (Πηγὴ γνώσεως) and is based on a similar compilation drafted in the fifth century by St. Epiphanius of Cyprus. Islam, rather surprisingly, is treated as a Christian heresy and bears the number 101 in the printed edition. It follows a description of the

⁴ On the Byzantine anti-Islamic polemics, see C. Güterbock, *Der Islam im Lichte der Byzantinischen Polemik* (Berlin, 1912); W. Eichner, "Die Nachrichten über den Islam bei den Byzantinern," *Der Islam*, 23 (1936), pp. 133-162, 197-244; and H. G. Beck, "Vorsehung und Vorherbestimmung in der Theologischen Literatur der Byzantiner," *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 114 (1937), pp. 32-65. None of these studies goes further than to give a list of authors and to present a selection of their major arguments.

⁵ *Chronographia*, Bonn, ed. I, p. 559.

⁶ Mansi, *Concilia*, XIII, col. 357 B; cf. Matt. 9:9.

⁷ "Stand und Aufgaben der Damaskenos-Forschung," in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 17 (1951), pp. 18, 23-24.

⁸ PG, 94, cols. 764-773.

sect of the Αὐτοπροσκόπται (a peculiar deviation of Christian monasticism) and precedes the paragraph on the Iconoclasts. In some manuscripts Islam figures under No. 100 and follows immediately after the Monothelites (No. 99).

2. *A Dialogue between a Saracen and a Christian*, a combination of two *opuscula*, both of which are to be found also under the name of Theodore Abu-Qurra, an author who will be mentioned later in this paper. The *Dialogue* has been published twice under the name of John of Damascus, once by Lequien and once by Gallandus, both editions being reprinted in Migne.⁹ In each of these editions, the two original *opuscula* are in reverse order, which underlines the inconsistency of the Damascene's manuscript tradition on this point and strongly suggests that the *Dialogue* is a compilation of Abu-Qurra's writings, attributed to John of Damascus by later scribes.¹⁰

3. Another dialogue, formally ascribed to Abu-Qurra in the title, which, however, specifies that Theodore had written διὰ φωνῆς Ἰωάννου Δαμασκηνοῦ. The expression διὰ φωνῆς, an equivalent of ἀπὸ φωνῆς, is a technical expression, recently and convincingly studied by M. Richard¹¹: it means "according to the oral teaching" of John of Damascus. The real author here is obviously Abu-Qurra, and, as a matter of fact, the *Dialogue* is also found in some manuscripts under his name, without any mention of John of Damascus.¹²

4. The fourth anti-Islamic writing ascribed to John is an unpublished Arabic *Refutation* which has never been studied.

Out of all these texts, the chapter on Islam in the *De haeresibus* appears, therefore, to be the only reliable one. But even in this instance, doubts have been expressed concerning its authenticity and the quotations from the Qurran are considered by some scholars to be a later interpolation.¹³

Therefore, whatever the result of further critical investigation of the anti-Islamic writings attributed to John of Damascus, it appears that his contribution to the history of Byzantine polemics against Islam is slight. If one admits the authenticity of these writings even in part, it will be seen below that chronologically they were not the earliest to have been written on the subject by a Byzantine author. Theologically, they do not add much to the unquestionable glory of John of Damascus, defender of the veneration of icons, author of the first systematic *Exposition of the Orthodox faith*, and one of the most talented hymnographers of Eastern Christianity. The study of the liturgical texts ascribed to John of Damascus strongly confirms the impression first gained from reading the chapter on Islam in the *De haeresibus*—that of John living in a Christian ghetto which preserves intact the Byzantine political and historical outlook. In his hymns he prays for "the victory

⁹ *Ibid.*, cols. 1585–1596 (Lequien); 96, cols. 1335–1348 (Gallandus). The text corresponds almost verbatim to the *Opuscula*, 35 (*ibid.*, cols. 1587 A–1592 C) and 36 (97, cols. 1592 CD) of Abu-Qurra.

¹⁰ H. G. Beck, while still tending to accept John's authorship, mentions a manuscript where the *Dialogue* is anonymous and another where it is ascribed to Sisinnius the Grammarian (*Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich* [Munich, 1959], p. 478).

¹¹ Ἀπὸ φωνῆς, in *Byzantion*, 20 (1950), pp. 191–222.

¹² Cf. PG, 97, col. 1543.

¹³ A. Abel, in *Byzantion*, 24 (1954), p. 353, note 2.

of the Emperor over his enemies";¹⁴ he hopes that through the intercession of the Theotokos, the *basileus* "will trample under his feet the barbarian nations."¹⁵ He never fails to mention the "cross-bearing Sovereign (σταυρόφορος Ἀναξ)" as the shield protecting Christ's inheritance from the "blasphemous enemies."¹⁶ And there is no ambiguity concerning the identity of these enemies: they are "the people of the Ishmaelites, who are fighting against us" and whom the Theotokos is asked to put under the feet of the piety-loving Emperor (Ἰσμηλίτην λαὸν καθυποτάττων τὸν πολεμοῦντα ἡμᾶς φιλευσεβοῦντι βασιλεῖ).¹⁷

In mind and in heart John still lives in Byzantium. The fact that the Byzantine Emperor—whose victorious return to the Middle East he is hopefully expecting—has actually fallen into the iconoclastic heresy is, for him, a matter of greater concern than are the beliefs of the Arab conquerors. And he is certainly much better informed about the events in Constantinople than about Islam.

Even if it is eventually proved that the last part of chapter 101 of the *De haeresibus*, which contains quotations from the Qurran, is not a later interpolation, this would not provide clear evidence that John had, in fact, read the Qurran.¹⁸ Any knowledge of Islam, direct or indirect, which is betrayed by John, relates to four suras only—the second, the third, the fourth, and the fifth—and to the oral Islamic traditions, especially those connected with the veneration of the *Ka'aba* in Mecca, which give John a pretext to deride the Islamic legends about Abraham's camel having been attached to the sacred stone. The knowledge of oral Arab traditions, sometimes more ancient than Islam, displayed by John and by other Byzantine polemicists is perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of the type of literature which we are studying; yet, at the same time, it illustrates the casual and superficial character of their acquaintance with Islam. Legendary commonplaces about the origins of Islam are repeated by different authors in different ways. I shall mention but one example, one which shows that John is neither original nor better informed than other Greeks in this matter. John refers to a pre-Islamic Meccan cult of Aphrodite, named Χαβέρ or Χαβάρ by the Arabs, which survived in the form of the veneration of a sacred stone, the *Ka'aba*.¹⁹ The same account is also mentioned by Constantine Porphyrogenitus in the *De administrando imperio*. This is what Constantine writes: "They pray also to the star of Aphrodite which they call Κουβάρ, and in their supplication cry out Ἀλλᾶ οὐὰ Κουβάρ, that is, God and Aphrodite. For they call God Ἀλλᾶ; and οὐὰ they use for the conjunction *and* and they call the star Κουβάρ. And so they say Ἀλλᾶ οὐὰ Κουβάρ."²⁰

¹⁴ *Octoechos*, Sunday Matins, Tone 1, canon 1, ode 9, *Theotokion*.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Tone 3, canon 1, ode 9, *Theotokion*.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Tone 4, canon 2, ode 9, *Theotokion*.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Tone 8, canon 2, ode 9, *Theotokion*.

¹⁸ J. R. Merrill, "On the Tractate of John of Damascus on Islam," *Muslim World*, 41 (1951), p. 97; cf. also P. Khoury, "Jean Damascène et l'Islam," *Proche Orient chrétien*, 7 (1957), pp. 44-63; 8 (1958), pp. 313-339.

¹⁹ PG, 94, cols. 764 B, 769 B.

²⁰ Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, I, 14, ed. by Moravcsik, trans. by R. J. H. Jenkins (Budapest, 1949), pp. 78-79.

It is for the Arabists to inform us how much of this imperial excursion into the field of etymology, which is obviously parallel to, though independant of, the Damascene's text, is of any value. The traditional Islamic invocation *Allahu akbar*—"God is very great"—which is obviously referred to here, puzzled the Byzantine authors from the eighth century onwards. About 725, that is before the time of John of Damascus, Germanus of Constantinople also mentions that "the Saracens, in the desert, address themselves to an inanimate stone and make an invocation to the so-called Χοβάρ (τὴν τε λεγομένου Χοβάρ ἐπικλησιν)." ²¹ John of Damascus identifies Χαβάρ or Χαβέρ (he uses the two forms) with both Aphrodite herself, and with the *Ka'aba*, which according to him represents the head of the pagan goddess. ²² In the ninth century, Nicetas also speaks of the "idol of Χουβάρ" (προσκυνεῖ τῷ Χουβάρ εἰδώλῳ) said to represent Aphrodite. ²³ That some cult of the Morning Star existed among the Arabs before the rise of Islam seems certain, and this was known to the Byzantines, who attempted, of course, to find traces of paganism in Islam itself. However, the example of the passage on Aphrodite proves that John of Damascus did not add anything substantial to the information on Islam already available to the Byzantines of his time, ²⁴ and that he merely made use of an accepted argument which conveniently confirmed the Byzantine belief that the Arabs "were devoted to lechery." ²⁵

We have already noted, on the other hand, that John lists Islam among the Christian heresies. This attitude toward Islam was based on the fact that the Qurran admits the revealed character of both Judaism and Christianity. John and his contemporaries tended, therefore, to apply to Islam the criteria of Christian Orthodoxy and to assimilate Islam with a Christian heresy *already* condemned. Thus Muhammad was an Arian, because he denied the Divinity of the Logos and of the Holy Spirit; hence, probably, the legend of Muhammad being instructed in the Christian religion by an *Arian* monk. ²⁶ In fact, the contact of early Islam with Christianity involved the Monophysite and the Nestorian communities, certainly not the Arians, and the appellation ascribed by John to the Moslems—κόπται τοῦ Θεοῦ ("cutters of God") ²⁷—because they cut away from God the Logos and the Spirit, is but a reply to the Moslem accusation directed against Christians that they are ἑταιρίασται—"those who admit partners of God." ²⁸

²¹ *Letter to Thomas of Claudiopolis*, PG, 98, col. 168 CD.

²² *De haeresibus*, ed. cit., 764 B, 769 B.

²³ *Refutatio Mohamedis*, PG, 105, col. 793 B.

²⁴ It should be noted, however, that the Damascene gives a *translation* of the word Χαβάρ, and interprets it as meaning "great" in the feminine form (ὅπερ σημαίνει μεγάλη—col. 764 B). This has led G. Sablukov to see the origin of the form used by Nicetas and Constantine (Κουβάρ or Χουβάρ) in the *feminine form* of *akbar-koubra*, and to infer that the Byzantines knew of a pre-Islamic Arab invocation of Aphrodite—*Allata koubra* ("Zametki po voprosu o vizantiiskoi protivomusul'manskoi literature" in *Pravoslavnyi Sobesednik*, 2 [1878], pp. 303–327; cf. also a similar etymological argument put forward by Georgius Hamartolus, ed. by de Boor, II, p. 706).

²⁵ B. Lewis, in *Constantine Porphyrogenitus, De administrando*, II, *Commentary* (London, 1962), p. 72.

²⁶ PG, 94, 765 A.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 768 D.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 760 B.

Together with these polemical arguments dealing with the opposition between the absolute monotheism of Islam and the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, John touches upon another acute point of disagreement—the question of free will and of predestination—and his whole argument is supported by the most violent epithets which he applies to Muhammad, the “pseudo-prophet,” the “hypocrite,” the “liar,” and the “adulterer.” All this was, of course, later taken up at length by other polemicists.

Two names deserve quite special mention in the history of early Byzantine polemics against Islam. One is that of an Arabic-speaking Bishop, Theodore Abu-Qurra who lived in Moslem occupied territory, mainly in Syria, in the second half of the eighth century. The other is that of Nicetas Byzantios, a scholar from the entourage of Photius. Although they wrote in very different styles and were involved in different situations, both Theodore and Nicetas were much better acquainted with Islam than was John of Damascus; Theodore, because he lived side by side with the Moslems and engaged them in dialogue, and Nicetas, because he had studied the entire text of the Qurran.

Abu-Qurra wrote in both Greek and Arabic. Of his fifty-two short Greek treatises, most were composed in the form of dialogues with various heretics encountered by the author (Nestorians, Monophysites, Origenists) and seventeen are directed against Islam. It is from these short *Opuscula*²⁹ that one can sense the true nature of the relations which existed between Moslems and Christians in the eighth century. The dialogues of Theodore maintain, it is true, a strictly negative attitude towards the faith of Islam and towards the person of Muhammad, an Arianizing false prophet (1560 A), possessed by an evil spirit (1545 B–1548 A). But the arguments used are conceived in such a way as to be understood by the opponents; they correspond to an attempt at real conversation. Here are some examples: the Arabs refuse to believe in the Trinitarian doctrine, because it brings division of God?—But the Qurran is one, even if many copies can be made of it; in the same way, God is One and Three (1528 C D). A short dialogue is entirely devoted to the Christian doctrine of the Eucharist, which, of course, was difficult for Moslems to understand; here Theodore relies on medical images familiar to both sides: the descent of the Holy Spirit on bread and wine which are thereby changed into the Body and Blood of Christ is similar to the action of the liver which assimilates food through the emission of heat (1552 D–1553 C). In a question which was unavoidable in any conversation between a Moslem and a Christian, that of polygamy, Theodore adopts a pragmatic attitude, which he knows will be better understood by his opponent than any reference to high morality or to the sacrament of marriage. “A woman,” Theodore writes, “marries a man for the sake of pleasure and childbirth.” But can one imagine a greater human pleasure than that which Adam and Eve enjoyed in Paradise, where, however, they were under a regime of monogamy? And when the Moslem still maintains that he prefers polygamy because it secures quicker multiplication of the human race, Theodore answers that since God did not care for a quick multi-

²⁹ The Greek treatises of Abu-Qurra are published in PG, 97, cols. 1461–1609.

plication of men when man was *alone* on earth, he certainly does not desire too great a proliferation today. . . . And he concludes the argument by reminding the Moslem of the unavoidable quarrels and scenes of jealousy which occur in a harem (1556 A–1558 D).

The pragmatic character of some of Abu-Qurra's dialogues does not preclude the use of more technical theological arguments. Theodore is a trained Aristotelian, and he is well aware of all of the refinements of Byzantine Trinitarian doctrine and Christology. When the Moslem objects to the doctrine of the death of Christ—the person of Christ is made up of a body and a soul, their separation would mean the disappearance of Christ as a person—Theodore answers by referring to the Orthodox doctrine of the hypostatic union which is based upon the unity of Christ's *divine* hypostasis which is and remains, even in death, the unifying factor of all the elements composing the God-man. This is why the body of Christ remained uncorrupted in the grave (1583–1584).

The discussion very often touches on the doctrine of predestination, which was promoted in orthodox Islam and was often discussed in the Moslem world. It is, of course, refuted by Theodore in a series of arguments which reflect actual conversations on a popular level: if Christ had to die voluntarily, says the Moslem, then the Christians must thank the Jews for having contributed to the realization of God's will, since *everything* which happens is in accordance with His will. Theodore replies: since you say that all those who die in the holy war against the infidels go to heaven, you must thank the Romans for killing so many of your brethren (1529 A). But the discussion on predestination runs also on a more philosophical and theological level: Theodore explains the Christian doctrine of the divine creative act, which was completed in the first six days and which, since then, has given to human free will the opportunity to act, to create, and to chose; if any predestination toward good exists, it is derived from baptism, which is a new birth and which should be freely accepted and followed by good works (1587 A–1592 C).³⁰

Many of the theological points touched upon by Theodore are also discussed in the lengthy treatise written by Nicetas Byzantinos and dedicated to the Emperor Michael III.³¹ Nicetas writes in Constantinople and has probably never spoken to a Moslem, but he has a complete text of the Qurran and gives a systematic criticism of it, with exact quotations of various suras under their titles and numbers. (The latter do not always correspond to those used in the modern editions of the Qurran.) Nicetas' book is in two parts:

1. An apologetical exposition of the Christian faith, concentrated mainly on the doctrine of the Trinity (673–701).
2. A systematic refutation of the Qurran in thirty chapters (701–805). Nicetas' refutation is purely academical and scholarly in character; it is an intellectual exercise of the kind one may expect from the learned circle of scholars gathered around Photius and financed by the Caesar Bardas and the

³⁰ This passage on predestination is reproduced verbatim in the *Dialogue* attributed to John of Damascus (PG, 96, cols. 1336–1340).

³¹ PG, 105, cols. 669 A–805.

court of Michael III. Basically it reflects the impression produced by the Qurran on a Byzantine intellectual of the ninth century who has been given the assignment of refuting the new faith. He performs his task carefully, but without any real concern for an eventual Moslem auditor or reader.

Comparing the Qurran with Christian Scripture, he speaks of the "most pitiful and the most inept little book of the Arab Muhammad (τὸ οἰκτιστον καὶ ἀλόγιστον τοῦ Ἀραβος Μωάμετ βιβλίδιον), full of blasphemies against the Most High, with all its ugly and vulgar filth," which does not have even the appearance of any of the biblical *genres* and is neither prophetic, nor historical, nor juridical, nor theological, but all confused. How can this, he asks, be sent from heaven? Nicetas does not know Arabic himself and uses several different translations of the Qurran. This is apparent, for example, in his treatment of the famous sura CXII, directed against the Christian trinitarian doctrine, which is thenceforth an inevitable subject in every discussion of faith between Christians and Moslems:

"Say, 'He is God alone!
God the Eternal!
He begets not and is not begotten!
Nor is there like unto Him any one!'"

(*Palmer's translation*)

The Arab word *šamad* which means "solid," "massive," "permanent"—rendered here by the English *eternal*—is at first, at the beginning of Nicetas' book, translated by the Greek ὀλόσφαιρος, i.e., "all-spherical," which gives Nicetas an opportunity of ridiculing such a material conception of the Divinity (708 A). Later, he corrects his translation and renders *šamad* by ὀλόσφυρος, which evokes a solid metallic mass, beaten by a hammer, and which is closer to the concrete image of God given by the Coranic text (776 B).

Another example of a misunderstanding due to a faulty translation: Nicetas accuses the Qurran of teaching that man comes "from a leech" (ἐκ βδέλλης—708 A). In fact, the Arabic text (sura XCVI, 2) speaks of a particle of congealed blood.

I have chosen these examples, among many others in the Nicetas text, because they are repeated by many other Byzantine authors and occupy a central place in later polemics. They illustrate the permanent misunderstanding between the two cultures and the two religious mentalities, but also show the positive knowledge of Coranic texts on the part of some Byzantines. Nicetas Byzantios, for example, had obviously studied the Qurran, even if in faulty translations, which was probably unavoidable at this early stage of Byzantine-Arab relations. On the other hand, it can be asked whether, in some instances, such Byzantine interpretations of Islam doctrine as the alleged belief in the spherical shape of God or the leech as the origin of man, did not, in fact, come from some forms of popular Arab religion—distinct, of course, from orthodox Islam—which were known to the Byzantines.

A complete survey of the Byzantine literature directed against Islam should, of course, include the study of many Byzantine documents belonging chronologically to later periods which are outside the scope of our paper. It will be sufficient to mention here that, from the eleventh to the fifteenth century, the knowledge of Islam gradually increases in Byzantium. A thirteenth-century writer, Bartholomew of Edessa³² already shows some knowledge of the role of Othman and Abu-Bakr after the death of Muhammad. In the fourteenth century, the retired Emperor John Cantacuzenus gathers an even richer documentation. He composes four *Apologies* of Christianity directed against the Moslems, and four treatises (λόγοι) refuting the Qurran.³³ In addition to earlier Byzantine sources, he uses the Latin *Refutation of Islam* by a Florentine Dominican monk, Ricaldus de Monte-Croce († 1309), translated by Demetrius Kydones.³⁴ Cantacuzenus seems to have regarded the publication of his anti-Islamic writings as a major event in his life: in the well-known, beautiful copy of his theological works, ordered for his private library by Cantacuzenus himself and which is now in Paris (*Paris. gr.* 1242), the ex-Emperor had himself represented holding a scroll with an inscription Μέγας ὁ Θεὸς τῶν Χριστιανῶν which is the *Incipit* of his work against Islam. Although his general method of refutation remains rather academic and abstract, there is no doubt that Cantacuzenus is better aware than many of his predecessors of the new situation in which he lives. He faces the Islamic challenge realistically and shows readiness to seek information and arguments in any source, even in the work of a Latin monk (He quotes his source: "a monk of the order of the preachers—τῆς τάξεως τῶν Πρεδικοτόρων, ἦτοι τῶν κηρύκων—of the name of Ricaldos, went to Babylon . . . and, having worked much, learned the dialect of the Arabs."³⁵). And his prayers are not only for the destruction, but also for the conversion of the Moslems:³⁶ all this proves that he took Islam much more seriously than did the authors of the eighth and the ninth centuries. It is perhaps worth recalling here that a friend of Cantacuzenus, the famous hesychast theologian and Archbishop of Thessalonica, Gregory Palamas, describes in 1354 his journey to Turkish-occupied Asia Minor in a rather optimistic tone, hoping, like Cantacuzenus, for a subsequent conversion of Moslems and implying the acceptance, for the time being, of a friendly coexistence.³⁷

II

Byzantine polemical literature has largely determined the official canonical attitude of the Church towards Islam, an attitude which is reflected in the rites of the reception of Moslem converts to Christianity. One such very ancient

³² Ἐλεγχος Ἀγαρηνοῦ, PG, 104, cols. 1384–1448; for the date, see Eichner, *op. cit.*, pp. 137–138.

³³ PG, 154, cols. 373–692.

³⁴ Translation published in PG, 154, cols. 1035–1152.

³⁵ PG, 154, col. 601.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, col. 584.

³⁷ On this episode, see J. Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas* (Paris, 1959), pp. 157–162.

rite contains a series of twenty-two anathemas against Moslem beliefs.³⁸ The convert is required to anathematize Muhammad, all the relatives of the Prophet (each by name) and all the caliphs until Yezid (680–683). The fact that no later caliph is mentioned has led Fr. Cumont to conclude that the rite dates from the early eighth century. However, since the list lacks any chronological order (the name of Yezid is followed by that of Othman, the third Caliph), the argument does not seem altogether conclusive.

Other anathemas are directed against the Qurran: the Moslem conception of paradise, where all sorts of sins will take place “since God cannot be ashamed”; polygamy; the doctrine of predestination, which leads to the idea that God Himself is the origin of evil; the Moslem interpretation of the Gospel stories and the Qurran’s treatment of the Old Testament. The anathemas repeat many of the arguments used by polemicists: the Arab worship of Aphrodite, called Χαβάρ, and the theory that has man issuing from a leech are mentioned, and the convert to Christianity is required to renounce them formally.

The author of the rite obviously knew more about Islam than did John of Damascus. He probably made use of Nicetas’ treatise and also of other contemporary sources. It seems reasonable, therefore, to place the composition of the rite in the ninth century, at a time when similar rituals for the admission of Jews and Paulicians were composed. At any rate, this particular rite was still in use in the twelfth century because Nicetas Choniates gives a detailed account of a conflict which opposed the Emperor Manuel I to the Patriarchal Synod and in which Eustathios, metropolitan of Thessalonica, played a leading role.³⁹ In 1178, Manuel published two decrees, ordering the deletion of the last anathema from the rite, starting with the copy in use at the Great Church of St. Sophia. The anathema, quoted from sura CXII, reads as follows: “I anathematize the God of Muhammad about whom he says: ‘He is God alone, God the Eternal [the Greek text reads ὀλόσφυρος—of “hammer-beaten metal”], He begets not and is not begotten, nor is there like unto Him any one.’ ”

The reason for this measure was that the Emperor was afraid to scandalize the converts by obliging them to anathematize not only the beliefs of Muhammad, but also “the God of Muhammad,” for this seemed to imply that Christians and Moslems did not, in fact, believe in one and the same God. The imperial measure provoked strong opposition on the part of the Patriarch and the Synod. Eustathios of Thessalonica, who acted as the Church’s spokesman in

³⁸ This rite has been published by F. Sylburg (Heidelberg, 1595). Sylburg’s edition has been reprinted as a part of the *Thesaurus Orthodoxae fidei* of Nicetas Choniates in PG, 140, cols. 123–138. A new edition of the rite has been issued by F. Montet, “Le rituel d’abjuration des Musulmans dans l’Eglise grecque,” in the *Revue de l’histoire des religions*, 53 (1906), pp. 145–163, with a French translation of the Anathemas. This new edition does not replace Sylburg’s, which is more complete. Cf. observations on Montet’s edition in S. Ebersolt, “Un nouveau manuscrit sur le rituel d’abjuration des Musulmans dans l’Eglise grecque” in the same *Revue de l’histoire des religions*, 54 (1906), pp. 231–232; Cf. Clermont-Ganneau, “Ancien rituel grec pour l’abjuration des Musulmans,” *Recueil d’archéologie orientale*, 7 (Paris, 1906), pp. 254–257; Fr. Cumont, “L’origine de la formule grecque d’abjuration imposée aux Musulmans,” in *Revue de l’histoire des religions*, 64 (1911), pp. 143–150.

³⁹ Nicetas Choniates, *Historia*, Bonn ed., pp. 278–286; on the whole episode, see C. G. Bonis “Ο Θεσσαλονίκης Εὐστάθιος καὶ οἱ δύο «τόμοι» τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος Μανουῆλ Α’ Κομνηνοῦ (1143/80) ὑπὲρ τῶν εἰς τὴν χριστιανικὴν ὁρθοδοξίαν μετισταμένων Μωαμεθανῶν,” in *Ἑπετηρίς Ἑταιρείας Βυζαντινῶν Σπουδῶν*, 19 (1949), pp. 162–169.

this matter, proclaimed that a God believed to be "of hammer-beaten metal" is not the true God, but a material idol, which should be anathematized as such. After some argument between the palace and the patriarchate, a compromise solution was found. The Emperor withdrew his original decree; the twenty-second anathema was retained in the ritual, but now it read simply: "Anathema to Muhammad, to all his teaching and all his inheritance." This text was preserved in the later editions of the *Euchologion*.

The episode is significant inasmuch as it clearly illustrates the existence in Byzantium of two views on Islam: the extreme and "closed" one, which adopted an absolutely negative attitude towards Muhammadanism and considered it a form of paganism, and another, the more moderate one, which tried to avoid burning all bridges and to preserve a measure of common reference, in particular, the recognition of a common allegiance to monotheism.

Manuel I belonged to this second group, and in this respect he followed the tradition which seems always to have been predominant in official governmental circles of Byzantium. One can see this from the next category of documents which we shall examine—the letters addressed by the Byzantine emperors and officials to their Arab colleagues.

III

First, and historically most important, is a letter of Leo III to the Caliph Omar II. Omar II reigned for only three years (717–720), and the letter can, therefore, be dated with relative precision. I cannot discuss here in detail the problem of its authenticity. The fact that there was some correspondence on questions of faith between Leo and Omar is explicitly attested by Theophanes,⁴⁰ but the original Greek text of Leo's letter (or letters) is lost. A short Latin version has been published by Champerius, who quite wrongly attributes the letter to Leo VI.⁴¹ This attribution is accepted without question by Krumbacher and Eichner. A much longer Armenian version has been preserved by the Historian Ghevond. It reproduces the original text, possibly with some minor additions.⁴²

The document is interesting in more than one respect: 1. It emanates from the first Iconoclastic emperor, but precedes the Iconoclastic controversy itself and thus provides valuable evidence on Leo's views about icon veneration at this early period; this evidence is confirmed, as we shall see later, in other contemporary sources. 2. It is the first known Byzantine text which refutes

⁴⁰ *Chronographia*, Bonn ed., II, p. 399.

⁴¹ This version is reproduced in PG, 107, cols. 315–24..

⁴² English translation, commentary, and bibliography in A. Jeffery, "Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between Umar II and Leo III," in the *Harvard Theological Review*, 37 (1944), pp. 269–332. Jeffery offers a convincing amount of internal and external evidence in favor of the letter's authenticity, in opposition to H. Beck, *Vorsehung und Vorherbestimmung*, pp. 43–46, who thinks that the letter could not be earlier than the late ninth century. Cf. also A. Abel's recent suggestion that Leo the Mathematician is possibly the author (*Byzantion*, 24 [1954], p. 348, note 1). Among earlier believers in the authenticity of the letter, see B. Berthold, "Khalif Omar II i protivorechivyya izvestiia o ego lichnosti," in *Khristianskii Vostok*, VI, 3 (1922), p. 219.

Islam, and it shows a knowledge of the subject much wider than that of other contemporary polemicists.

Leo's letter is a reply to a solemn appeal by Omar to send him an exposition of the Christian faith. In fact, it was customary for the early Caliphs, at their enthronement, to send such requests to infidel princes, denouncing their beliefs and calling upon them to join Islam. Omar asks Leo to furnish him with the arguments that make Leo prefer Christianity to any other faith, and puts several questions to him: "Why have the Christian peoples, since the death of the disciples of Jesus, split into seventy-two races?... Why do they profess three gods?... Why do they adore the bones of apostles and prophets, and also pictures and the cross?..."⁴³

Leo's answers are all based on sound exegesis of both the Bible and the Qur'an. For him there is no question of relying on popular legends or misrepresentations. He does not feel the need of condemning the alleged cult of Aphrodite in Islam or of having Omar renounce the doctrine which claims that man's origin was the leech. He does not doubt that he and his correspondent believe in the same God, that the latter accepts the Old Testament as revealed truth. Is Omar looking for arguments in support of the true religion? But there are numerous prophets and apostles who affirmed the divinity of Jesus, while Muhammad stands alone.... And how can one say that the Qur'an is above all criticism? "We know," Leo writes "that it was 'Umar, Abu Turab and Solman the Persian, who composed [the Qur'an], even though the rumour has got round among you that God sent it down from the heavens...." And we know also that "a certain Hajjaj, named by you Governor of Persia, replaced ancient books by others, composed by himself, according to his taste...."⁴⁴ And is not Islam, the younger of the two religions, torn apart by schisms, even more serious than those which beset the comparatively ancient Christianity? These divisions occurred in Islam, Leo continues, although it arose among only one people, the Arabs, all of whom spoke the same tongue, while Christianity from the beginning was adopted by Greeks, Latins, Jews, Chaldeans, Syrians, Ethiopians, Indians, Saracens, Persians, Armenians, Georgians, and Albanians: some disputes among them were inevitable!⁴⁵

A large part of Leo's letter is devoted to the problems of cult and worship, in reply to Omar's attack on the Christian doctrine of the sacraments. The Byzantine Emperor's criticism of the *Ka'aba* cult has nothing of the mythical exaggeration of the other polemicists. He writes: "The region to which the prophets turned when they made their prayers is not known. It is you alone who are carried away to venerate the pagan altar of sacrifice that you call the House of Abraham. Holy Scripture tells us nothing about Abraham having gone to the place...."⁴⁶ And here is an interesting passage concerning the veneration of the Cross and the icons: "We honour the Cross because of the sufferings of that Word of God incarnate.... As for pictures, we do not give

⁴³ A. Jeffrey, *op. cit.*, pp. 277-278.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

⁴⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 297.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

them a like respect, not having received in Holy Scripture any commandment whatsoever in this regard. Nevertheless, finding in the Old Testament that divine command which authorized Moses to have executed in the Tabernacle the figures of the Cherubim, and, animated by a sincere attachment for the disciples of the Lord who burned with love for the Saviour Himself, we have always felt a desire to conserve their images, which have come down to us from their times as their living representations. Their presence charms us, and we glorify God who has saved us by the intermediary of His Only-Begotten Son, who appeared in the world in a similar figure, and we glorify the saints. But as for the wood and the colors, we do not give them any reverence."⁴⁷

This text clearly reflects a state of mind which was predominant at the court of Constantinople in the years which preceded the Iconoclastic decree of 726. The images are still a part of the official imperial orthodoxy, but Leo does not attach to them anything more than an educational and sentimental significance; the veneration of the Cross is more pronounced, and we know that it was preserved even by the Iconoclasts themselves. The use of images is justified explicitly by Old Testament texts, but no reverence is due to the "wood and colors." An attitude similar to that of Leo can be found in contemporary letters of Patriarch Germanus,⁴⁸ who, around 720, still represented the official point of view on images. The fact that it is expressed in the text of the letter, as preserved by Ghevond, is a clear indication of its authenticity, for neither the Iconoclasts, nor the Orthodox were capable, at a later date, of adopting towards the images so detached an attitude. The Orthodox, while still condemning the veneration of "wood and colors" in themselves, were to invoke the doctrine of the Incarnation in support of a sacramental—and not purely educational—approach to images, while the Iconoclasts were to condemn any image representing Christ and the saints.

Leo's text represents, therefore, an interesting example of Christian apologetics, based upon minimizing the role of images, and one can clearly see the importance of this apologetical attitude towards Islam in the early development of Iconoclasm. The Iconoclastic edict of 726 was merely the next and decisive stage of this development. As André Grabar has pungently remarked,⁴⁹ a "cold war" of propaganda and blackmail was carried on, side by side with the armed conflict which permanently opposed Byzantium to the caliphate, throughout the second part of the seventh century and the beginning of the eighth. Sacred images played an important role in this cold war, sometimes as a symbol of Christianity against the Infidel, sometimes as a proof of the Christians' idolatry. And, as in the cold war of today, the opponents often tended to use each other's methods. The correspondence between Leo III and Omar is an interesting phenomenon in the gradual emergence of the issues at stake.

The other extant letters of Byzantine officials relevant to our subject belong to the ninth and tenth century and are less important historically. About 850,

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 322.

⁴⁸ Cf., for example, his letter to Thomas of Claudiopolis, PG, 98, col. 173 D.

⁴⁹ *L'iconoclasme byzantin; dossier archéologique* (Paris, 1957), p. 47.

the Emperor Michael III received a letter ἐκ τῶν Ἀγαρηνῶν, "from the Arabs," and asked Nicetas Byzantios, the polemicist whose major work we have already examined, to answer them in his name. It is justifiable to suppose that the epistle that Michael III had received from the Caliph was similar to the one that Omar had sent to Leo III; in this case the Caliph would have been Al-Mutawakkil (847-861). The two answers written by Nicetas are concerned entirely with an exposition of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity which, the writer asserts, does not essentially contradict monotheism.⁵⁰ In his first refutation Nicetas repeats part of his polemical treatise dedicated to a positive *exposé* of Christian faith, but omits the direct polemics and criticism of the Qurran. We do not know whether Nicetas' writings were actually communicated to the Emperor's correspondent, but one can see at this point that, already in the ninth century, a significant difference existed between the internal use made of polemics and the requirements of diplomatic courtesy.

There is no doubt that the latter was observed in the correspondence between Photius and the Caliph, the existence of which is mentioned by his nephew, the Patriarch Nicholas Mystikos.⁵¹ Nicholas himself corresponded with the Caliph on political matters and three of his letters have been preserved. From them we learn that a good deal of mutual tolerance did, in fact, exist between Moslems and Christians, especially when the opponents were able to exercise retaliation in case of abuse. Since, according to the Patriarch's letter, the Arab prisoners could pray in a mosque in Constantinople without anyone obliging them to embrace Christianity, the Caliph should also cease to persecute Christians.⁵² And Nicholas refers to those laws of Muhammad himself that favor religious tolerance.⁵³ In another letter, he expresses in strong terms the belief in a single God which is shared by both Christians and Moslems: all authority comes from God and it is "from this unique God that we all received the power of government," and "the two powers over all powers on earth, i.e., that of the Arabs and that of the Romans, have preeminence [over all] and shine as the two big lights of the firmament. And this in itself is a sufficient reason for them to live in fraternal fellowship."⁵⁴

One wonders whether, side by side with these official diplomatic letters, one may not justifiably mention here an infamous and tasteless pamphlet composed about 905-906 in Constantinople and wrongly ascribed to Arethas, bishop of Caesarea, a famous scholar and a disciple of Photius. The pamphlet consists essentially of a number of jokes in poor taste about the Moslem conception of Paradise. As Professor R. J. H. Jenkins has recently shown, the real author of the pamphlet is a certain Leo Choirosphactes,⁵⁵ whom Arethas

⁵⁰ PG, 105, cols. 807-821, 821-841.

⁵¹ PG, 111, cols. 36 D-37 A.

⁵² *Ibid.*, cols. 309 C-316 C.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, col. 317 A.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, col. 28 B; on the true nature of this letter, addressed not to an "emir of Crete," as the present superscription states, but to the Caliph himself, see R. J. H. Jenkins, "The Mission of St. Demetrianus of Cyprus to Bagdad," *Annuaire de l'Institut de Phil. et d'Hist. Orient. et Slaves*, 9 (1949), pp. 267-275.

⁵⁵ The "letter to Arethas" has been published by J. Compennass, *Denkmäler der griechischen Volks-*

ridicules in a dialogue entitled *Χοιροσφάκτης ἢ Μισογόης*.⁵⁶ For us, interest in this document resides in the fact that it shows that Byzantine anti-Islamic polemics could be pursued simultaneously at very different levels, and that diplomatic courtesy and intellectual understanding at the Government level did not prevent slander and caricaturization at others.

IV

In the early eighth century, John of Damascus describes with horror the heresy which appeared "in the time of Heraclius": "the deceptive error of the Ishmaelites, a forerunner of Antichrist." And six centuries later, John Cantacuzenus, in almost the same terms, refers to the same cataclysm "which appeared under Heraclius." There was an abyss between the two religions which no amount of polemics, no dialectical argument, no effort at diplomacy, was able to bridge. Insurmountable on the spiritual and the theological level, this opposition from the very beginning also took the shape of a gigantic struggle for world supremacy, because both religions claimed to have a universal mission, and both empires world supremacy. By the very conception of its religion, Islam was unable to draw a distinction between the "political" and "spiritual," but neither did Byzantium ever want to distinguish between the universality of the Gospel and the imperial universality of Christian Rome. This made mutual understanding difficult and led both sides to consider that holy war was, after all, the normal state of relations between the two Empires.

One may, nevertheless, be permitted to ask what the situation was on the popular level. What was the attitude of the average Christian towards the Moslem in their everyday relations both in the occupied lands and inside the limits of the Empire where Arab merchants, diplomats, and prisoners were numerous? Hagiography seems to be the best source for a possible answer to this question. My cursory observations in this area have shown, however, that here, too, the solution cannot be a simple one. On the one hand, we have a great number of the Lives of martyrs with the description of massacres perpetrated by Moslems—that of the monks of Saint Sabbas,⁵⁷ that of sixty Greek pilgrims to Jerusalem in 724, whose death marked the end of a seven-year truce between Leo III and the Caliphate,⁵⁸ that of the forty-two martyrs of Amorium captured during the reign of Theophilus,⁵⁹ that of numerous Christians who, having succumbed to pressure, adopted Islam, but later repented and went back to

sprache, 1 (Bonn, 1911), pp. 1-9; French trans. by A. Abel, "La lettre polémique 'd'Aréthas' à l'émir de Damas," *Byzantion*, 24 (1954), pp. 343-370; another edition by P. Karlin-Hayter in *Byzantion*, 29-30 (1959-1960), pp. 281-302; for the definitive word, see R. J. H. Jenkins, "Leo Choerosphactes and the Saracen Vizier," *Vizant. Institut, Zbornik radova* (Belgrade, 1963), pp. 167-175.

⁵⁶ Ed. by J. Comperass, in *Didaskaleion*, 1, fasc. 3 (1912), pp. 295-318.

⁵⁷ Ed. by A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, in *Pravoslavnyi Palestinskii Sbornik* (1907), pp. 1-41.

⁵⁸ The two versions of this *Life* were published by A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, in *Pravoslavnyi Palest. Sbornik* (1892), pp. 1-7 and in *ibid.* (1907), pp. 136-163.

⁵⁹ Several versions of their Martyrium in Greek and in Slavonic were published by V. Vasil'evski and P. Nikitin in *Akademiia Nauk, Istoriko-filologicheskoe otdelenie, Zapiski*, 8th ser., VII, 2 (St. Petersburg, 1905).

the Church, as did for example, two eighth-century saints—Bacchus the Young and Elias the New.⁶⁰ No wonder then that in popular imagination the Moslem, any Moslem, was a horrible and an odious being: in the life of St. Andrew the *Salos* (the “fool for Christ’s sake”) Satan himself appears in the guise of an Arab merchant.⁶¹ Furthermore, Arabs who played a role in the Byzantine imperial administration had an extremely bad reputation among the people; such was the case with the “Saracens” who, according to the life of St. Theodore and St. Theophanes the *Graptoi*, were at the service of Emperor Theophilus,⁶² or with Samonas, the *parakeimomenos* of Leo VI. In occupied areas Christians often lived in closed *ghettos*, avoiding any intercourse with the Moslem masters of the land: when St. Stephen, who was a monk at Saint-Sabbas and a man of great prestige among both Christians and Moslems, learned that Elias, Patriarch of Jerusalem, had been arrested, he refused to go and intercede for him, because he knew that it would be of no avail.⁶³

Occasionally, the Lives of saints reproduce discussions which took place between Christians and Moslems, and in such cases they make use of the polemical literature examined above: in Euodius’ account of the martyrdom of the forty-two martyrs of Amorium, the problem of predestination is mentioned as a major issue between the two religions.⁶⁴ Among documents of this kind, the richest in content and the most original is an account of a discussion which took place about 850, in which Constantine, imperial ambassador to Samarra and future apostle of the Slavs, was involved. It is recorded in the Slavonic *Vita Constantini*. The attitude of the “Philosopher” Constantine is altogether apologetical: he defends the Christians against the accusation, mentioned above (p. 119), of being “cutters of God,”⁶⁵ he quotes the Qurran (sura XIX, 17) in support of the Christian doctrine of the Virgin birth, and, as did Abu-Qurra, refutes the Moslem contention that the division of Christianity into various heresies and sects is proof of its inconsistency.⁶⁶ He counterattacks with the accusation of moral laxity among the Moslems—the standard Christian objection to the Islamic pretense of being a God-revealed religion—and, finally, expresses the classical Byzantine claim that “the Empire of the Romans” is the only one blessed by God. He finds even a Biblical basis for this claim: in giving to his disciples the commandment to pay tribute to the emperor and in paying that tax for Himself and for others (Matthew 17:24–27; 22: 19–21), Jesus had in mind the Roman Empire only, not just any state; there is, therefore, no obligation for Christians to accept the Caliph’s rule. The Arabs have nothing to be proud of, even in the fields of arts or sciences,

⁶⁰ Chr. Loparev, “Vizantiiskiiia Zhitiia Sviatykh,” in *Vizant. Vremmenik*, 19 (1912), pp. 33–35.

⁶¹ PG, 111, col. 688.

⁶² PG, 116, cols. 673 C, 676 C.

⁶³ *Acta Sanctorum*, Jul. III, col. 511.

⁶⁴ *Ed. cit.*, pp. 73–74; cf. Abu-Qurra, *Opuscula*, 35, PG, 97, col. 1588 AB; Nicetas Byzantios, *Refutatio Mohammedis*, 30, PG, 105, col. 709; Bartholomew of Edessa, *Confutatio Agareni*, PG, 104, col. 1393 B.

⁶⁵ *Vita*, VI, 26, ed. by F. Grivec and F. Tomšič, in *Staroslovenski Institut, Radovi*, 5 (Zagreb, 1960), p. 104.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, VI, 16, p. 104.

for they are only the pupils of the Romans. "All arts came from us" (*ot' nas' sout' v'sa khoudozh'stvia ish'la*), Constantine concludes.⁶⁷ Fr. Dvornik is certainly right when he sees in this attitude of Constantine a typical Byzantine approach to all "barbarians," Latin or Arab, as expressed in several ninth-century documents issued by Michael III, Basil I, or the Patriarch Photius himself.⁶⁸ A cultural and national pride of this kind did not, of course, contribute much to mutual understanding between Christians and Moslems.

However, here and there, in the hagiographical writings, a more positive note is struck. In another passage of the *Life* of St. Stephen we are told that the Saint "received with sympathy and respected everyone, Moslems as well as Christians."⁶⁹ The holiness, the hospitality of some Christian saints are said to have favorably impressed the Saracens, who are then described in more generous terms in the Lives. This occurs, for example, in the early tenth century, when the Arabs invading the Peloponnesus are impressed by the holiness of St. Peter of Argos, and at once accept baptism.⁷⁰ At approximately the same time a Cypriot bishop, Demetrianos, travelling to Bagdad, is received by the Caliph and obtains the return to Cyprus of a number of Greek prisoners.⁷¹ Another significant story recounts that, under Michael II, after an attack on Nicopolis in Epirus, an Arab of the retreating Moslem army remains in the mountains and lives there for several years in complete isolation, afraid to mingle with the population. During these years, however, he manages to be baptized. One day a hunter kills him by mistake. He then is entered into the local *martyrologium* under the name of St. Barbaros, for even his name was not known. Again, Constantine Akropolis, starting his thirteenth-century account of St. Barbaros' life, begins with a quotation from St. Paul: "there is no Barbarian, nor Greek, but Christ is all in all."⁷²

On the other hand, one cannot deny the existence, especially in the later period under discussion, of some communication between Islam and Christianity on the level of spiritual practice and piety. It has been pointed out that a startling similarity exists between the Moslem *dhikr*—the invocation of the name of God connected with breathing—and the practices of the Byzantine hesychasts⁷³. Byzantine monasticism continued to flourish in Palestine and on Mount Sinai, while pilgrims continually visited the Holy Land. All this implies the existence of contacts that were other than polemical.

Yet, as we look at the over-all picture of the relations between the two religious worlds, we see that essentially they remained impenetrable by each other. Among all the historical consequences of the Arab conquest of the Middle East, one seems to me to be the *most important*: for ages Byzantine Christianity was kept on the defensive. Islam not only obliged the Christians

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, VI, 53, p. 105.

⁶⁸ *Les légendes de Constantin et de Méthode vues de Byzance* (Prague, 1933), pp. 110–111.

⁶⁹ *Acta Sanctorum*, Jul. III, col. 511.

⁷⁰ Mai, *Nova Patrum Bibliotheca*, IX, 3, 1–17.

⁷¹ *Life* of St. Demetrianos, ed. by H. Grégoire in BZ, 16 (1907), pp. 232–233.

⁷² Ed. by A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, in 'Αναλέκτα Ἱεροσολυμιτικῆς Σταχυολογίας, I, pp. 405–420.

⁷³ Cf., for example, L. Gardet, "Un problème de mystique comparée," in *Revue Thomiste* (1956), I, pp. 197–200.

to live in a tiny enclosed world which concentrated on the liturgical cult, it also made them feel that such an existence was a normal one. The old Byzantine instinct for conservatism, which is both the main force and the principal weakness of Eastern Christianity, became the last refuge which could ensure its survival in the face of Islam.